



PHOTO BY JIM ROBERTSON

Southgate Police Officer Chad Martin

ABBIE DARST | PROGRAM COORDINATOR

A true entrepreneur at heart, Southgate Police Officer Chad Martin is blazing new ground with his patented Viper Shield Rapid Deployment System, which he launched this summer at the Police Fleet trade show in Louisville. Born and raised in northern Kentucky, Martin joined the Navy two weeks after graduating high school. After four years and being trained in tactical response, Martin discovered his love for law enforcement and joined the Lexington Division of Police in 1998. Since then he has served in several Kentucky police agencies and even left the profession for 10 years — but never left his love for the profession. He joined the Southgate Police Department in 2012. He is married with two boys, ages 8 and 5 and is expecting his third child in April.

Working for the Kenton County Police Department was the polar opposite of urban policing. I went from the inner city housing projects on night shift in Lexington to an isolated, rural area in south Kenton County. I soon decided that I was going to dabble in small-business ownership and ended leaving law enforcement to start my own business.

I've always had a drive for business ownership and self employment. There was a stirring — I had to get into something that occupied my time, and that was the draw to self employment.

The concept for the Viper Shield dates back to my Lexington days. There was a domestic violence call where the fire department was dispatched and they beat law enforcement to the scene. The perpetrator opened fire and shot three firemen — two died. In that situation, police officers were on the perimeter while this guy was still firing at helpless individuals in the middle of the front yard, and officers couldn't get to them. It was 45 minutes before SWAT could assemble and get on scene.

The need for patrol to have ballistic shields was evident. What if that was me or our guys laying there needing help, and no one could get to us. That's a problem. We needed ballistic shields and equipment in patrol cars, but at that time there was nowhere to put them.

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Later, when I got into the glass security coating business, I discovered there was a way to create bullet-resistant glass with a certain thickness using security laminate. I began to question where on the patrol car we could create something to get some bullet resistance. I started thinking, “Maybe the clear polycarbonate section of the partition.” But after further engineering, the weight was unreasonable at 35 to 40 pounds.

Police cars and partitions started getting smaller and smaller. The area you have to work with now is much smaller. Ironically, a lot of tactical experts across the nation were beginning to push for patrol to have ballistic shields. They were finding the ones on the market were too big, too bulky and made for SWAT teams to get three to four guys behind it. That doesn't work in a school-shooting situation or in a foot pursuit.

SWAT operators were saying they needed smaller, lighter, more compact shields with which officers could run, fight and go upstairs. The design that shield manufacturers were trying to create to fill that need was getting very close to specs we were looking at in the partitions.

The Viper Shield System is a partition concept where the ballistic shield actually is stowable within the partition where it is secured and can't be accessed from the back seat. Prisoners can't get to it or do anything with it. There is a quick release cable over the officer's shoulder by his seatbelt that deploys the shield.

People usually put their shields in the trunk and bury them under traffic safety equipment or first aid equipment, and they can't get to them when needed. So during a felony traffic stop, tactically you could never get to that shield. You would have to pop the trunk, throw stuff out, get it out, close the trunk and go back to a car full of people who may be armed. With our shield, you exit the driver door, pop the back door open and it's already kicked out waiting for you. We can deploy it in about four seconds. It's there for the officer to grab and go no matter the situation.

The main thing I want to give officers with the Viper Shield is peace of mind. When you look at the statistics, most officers each year killed by gunfire are with head, neck and vital shots in areas not covered by ballistic vests. If you want to see a huge impact to officer fatalities by gunfire, give them something that protects their head, neck and vital areas. That's exactly what the Viper Shield does.

I have used the shield on three occasions where it was all the comfort in the world. One of the most recent was the Fort Thomas shooting at the medical plaza. A gentleman met his ex-wife after work and opened fire on her. We heard the call that there was an active shooter at the medical center. All agencies responded. By the time we got there, Fort Thomas had just made entry into the lobby. As they were getting ready to start making entry through the building, I yelled for them to hold up and I grabbed the shield, became the shield man and had a team ready to go through three stories, room to room with the protection of a shield. There is a lot of security in that.

Coming to work in Southgate was kind of like coming home. I attended school and grew up in this area, so when the opportunity came open, when the Highland Heights-Southgate merger dissolved, I jumped on it.

It's tough because I'm at a point where I'm trying to launch a business, work 40-hour weeks here with a small department that if there are shifts that need to be covered or someone is sick, someone else has to work extra hours, on top of picking up special events or any type of overtime that is available. Trying to find enough hours in the day to cover both while maintaining a family with a new baby on the way — there aren't enough hours in the day. 🐾

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